

Sunday Forum

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HSR facility would be good for Kern

High speed rail. For some, it has become a four letter word since being approved by California voters eight years ago — and the fact is, for Kern County, it is a four-letter word — JOBS.

At a time when the county is experiencing an economic crisis due to plummeting oil prices and an epic drought, job one should be recovery. It is imperative that we pursue ways to alleviate our economic crisis, stabilize our two legged economy and prepare for the opportunities of the future. As it turns out, just such a train may be pulling into the station.



**Mick
Gleason**

The fact that the high speed rail is coming is an imminent, inescapable fact. As a Kern County supervisor, I have never minced words on how I feel about the HSR, but try as I have, little can be done at the county level to put an end to it. The question then becomes, as a county, do we lay down across the tracks in an effort to stop the inevitable? Or, do we stand and fight, tooth and nail, to realize the significant benefits that could come to Kern County? The answer is obvious and it's called the heavy maintenance facility, or HMF.

First, a little background on the HMF. In 2009, the California High Speed Rail Authority released a "Request for Expression of Interest" for potential HMF locations in the Central Valley. Several locations are being considered, including Fresno, Merced, Shafter, Wasco, and Bakersfield. The HMF is integral to the operation of the HSR, and will be needed to keep the trains safe and functioning correctly. The facility will handle everything from routine maintenance and inspection to complete electrical and mechanical overhauls of the new trains.

According to the Kern Taxpayers Association, the heavy maintenance facility is estimated to generate one-time economic output of \$231 million for Kern County businesses (measured by business revenues), between 1,500 and 2,000 high-wage jobs, annual labor income of \$146 million, annual local and state taxes of \$25.9 million, and a \$245 million increase in the county's annual GDP. The initial construction alone of the HMF is expected to generate \$7.5 million to \$10.7 million in local and state tax revenues.

Additionally, while there are several other planned HSR projects in the U.S., California would be the first. This means the HMF will be the epicenter of a brand new industry in our nation. Manufacturers, suppliers and all manner of related commerce would conceivably locate nearby. If we can secure this new facility, Kern County could become the go-to supply and maintenance expert for the entire country. HSR maintenance would become one more in a long list of industries from oil and agriculture to aeronautics that Kern County has pioneered and in which we still rank number one.

As if that was not reason enough to want the HMF here, consider this. Kern County, as we know, is one of the largest ag and oil producing counties in the U.S. Since oil prices worldwide have fallen off a cliff since 2014, and our ground began drying up even earlier, our economy has taken a tremendous hit.

This leads me to make two points. The first point is this: Oil and ag are the lifeblood of this county, more so than anywhere else in California, and as a result we pay considerably more than any other county in cap and trade. Now that California will be doling out some of those cap and trade funds they have accrued from us, this is our chance to get those dollars back here in Kern County where they belong.

The second point: The hard hits that we have taken in recent years in oil and ag have had an extremely adverse impact on our job market. Not only will the HMF create jobs, the jobs created will be adding diversity to the local job market. These are jobs that will be much less subject to unpredictable market swings and uncontrollable circumstances. As long as the state is pushing the high speed rail, it will need the employees of the heavy maintenance facility to keep it running. Let's make sure those employees live and work right here in Kern County.

You may not support the high speed rail, but surely you support the jobs, revenue and commerce that will come to our region by locating the heavy maintenance facility in Kern County.

I am asking for your support. We are beginning a grass roots effort, in which we are inviting all Kern County residents to write to your newspapers, your city council, your county supervisors and your congressional representatives and tell them that you support the HSR heavy maintenance facility in Kern County. We can't sit idly by and watch hundreds of millions of dollars drift up the valley because we didn't do anything to keep them here. Won't you join me in securing our future?

Mick Gleason is 1st District Supervisor and chairman of the Kern County Board of Supervisors.